

# Antarctic skier encounters harrowing conditions

By TOM PFINGSTEN | Special to the U-T 7 a.m. Feb. 12, 2013 Updated 4:21 p.m. Feb. 11, 2013

VALLEY CENTER — It's summer south of the equator, and what a summer it was for Aaron Linsdau, who previously appeared in this column weeks before leaving for a solo skiing expedition across Antarctica.

Approaching the South Pole last month, the conditions were worse than anyone had anticipated, recalled Linsdau, who had originally planned to become the first American to ski alone and unsupported from Hercules Inlet to the pole and back, a 1,450-mile jaunt through some of the harshest terrain on Earth.

"As much as I wanted to do the round-trip, I ended up just making the pole," said Linsdau, who spent months training in Carlsbad before the trip. "It was such a challenging year. After all is said and done, I actually feel pretty good about it."

Setting out on Nov. 1 with 300 pounds of gear on a sled behind him, Linsdau had no way to foresee the bronchitis that would rob him of strength for more than a week, or the especially fierce blizzards that would blanket the continent toward the end of the expedition.

One day, the winds howled to 70 mph, confining him to his tent and robbing precious time.

"At the end, there were perpetual whiteouts, so I was skiing blind a lot," he told me. "That was educational."

Linsdau also encountered vast fields of ice formations — sculptures as well as steep drop-offs — created by the wind: "As they build up, they develop a life of their own," he explained. "At 115 miles from the pole, they essentially became impassable, so you had to go around entire valleys to get around these things."

Eventually, the National Science Foundation facility that sits on the South Pole rose into view — and stayed there for several days, an oasis on the horizon, Linsdau recalled.

"I'd see it, then it would totally disappear," he told me. "I was having navigation trouble right at the pole because your compass points you in the wrong direction. It was definitely harrowing."

"When you get to the South Pole, there's a huge station there — about 60,000 square feet — with all kinds of science equipment," he added. "My voice was actually weak, because I hadn't really spoken at full volume for a while. The people at the South Pole station were really nice, they showed me around."

But ultimately, Linsdau was a tourist in the eyes of the science foundation, and wound up camping outside the compound until his flight arrived and he began the long trip back to the U.S.

Now living in Jackson Hole, Wyo., Linsdau said he's working on a book about the experience, tentatively titled "Antarctic Tears," and plans to move back to San Diego in March.

Even though he only finished half of his planned trip, Linsdau said he's been told he was the 30th person in recorded history to ski alone from the geographic coast of Antarctica to the South Pole.

"I guess that's actually not too shabby," he said.

Jazz band: When the Southern California School Band and Orchestra Association held tryouts last month, 15 bassists showed up with their hulking, upright bass violins.

Valley Center's Joey Hahn, 14, was among them, and the high school freshman promptly played his way onto the "Honors Jazz Band."

During the same audition, dozens of other student musicians arrived with trumpets, and Valley Center's Jordan Beck, also 14, earned himself and his horn a place in the same band — a rare feat, to hear one proud father tell it.

"The band director was floored — it's actually pretty unusual that two students from the same high school get in, so that was a proud moment for Valley Center's band program," said Jeff Hahn, Joey's dad. "I think there were three students from San Diego County, and two of them were from the same high school, so that was pretty cool."

Joey Hahn has been playing the bass for around five years, since he was in elementary school.

Meanwhile, Jordan's father, Jeff Beck, is the band director at Valley Center High.

And you can bet that both dads were on hand last month to hear their sons play some jazz.

“It was really, really good — in fact, I made CDs and passed them out,” Hahn told me. “They ranged from old-style jazz to new wave jazz to salsa — all the variations, and they just nailed it. It was wonderful.”

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